

Draft Access Equity and Inclusion Policy – March 2022

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement of Country.....	4
Inclusion statement.....	4
Purpose.....	5
Context	5
The role of local government.....	5
Community context	6
Priority groups.....	6
Principles	7
Leadership.....	7
Community.....	7
Equity	7
Human rights and social justice	7
Our commitment.....	8
Application.....	9
Implementation and review	9
Complaints.....	9
Supporting Council policies, strategies and plans.....	10
Supporting legislation.....	10
Commonwealth.....	10
State.....	10
Glossary	12

If you require the Access Equity and Inclusion Policy in an alternative format, please email nillumbik@nillumbik.vic.gov.au or call 9433 3111.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Nillumbik Shire Council respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the Country on which Nillumbik is located, and we value the significance of the Wurundjeri people's history as essential to the unique character of the shire. We pay tribute to all First Nations People living in Nillumbik, give respect to Elders past, present and future, and extend that respect to all First Nations People.

We respect the enduring strength of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and acknowledge the ongoing impacts of past trauma and injustices from European invasion, massacres and genocide committed against First Nations People. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people hold a deep and ongoing connection to this place. We value the distinctive place of our First Nations People in both Nillumbik and Australia's identity; from their cultural heritage and care of the land and waterways, to their ongoing contributions in many fields including academia, agriculture, art, economics, law, sport and politics.

Inclusion statement

The following statement is intended to be a short version of our Policy commitment for use after the Acknowledgement of Country in Council publications:

Nillumbik Shire Council is committed to creating a fair, equitable and inclusive community where human rights are respected, participation is facilitated, barriers are reduced and diversity is celebrated. We support the rights of all people regardless of age, gender, ability or background. We value the diverse and changing nature of our community and understand that some groups and individuals experience more barriers than others.



- Council can be contacted through the [National Relay Service](#) (NRS). The NRS is available as a phone solution for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. All calls are confidential. Users must be registered via www.relayservice.gov.au to make and receive calls:
- TTY users phone 133 677, then ask for Council on 9433 3111.
- Speak and Listen (speech-to-speech) users phone 1300 555 727, then ask for Council on 9433 3111.
- A Hearing loop is located at the Civic Drive Customer Service Counter, Civic Centre, Civic Drive Greensborough
- Communication boards are available at the Civic Drive Customer Service Counter, Civic Centre, Civic Drive Greensborough.
- Interpreting services are available.

Purpose

This Nillumbik Access, Equity and Inclusion Policy outlines Councils commitment to equitable and inclusive practice across all council activities. The purpose of the policy is to:

- Demonstrate leadership
- Apply a lens over all council services
- Inform council decision making and investment
- Identify when and how we advocate
- Identify and consider unique and intersecting needs of priority groups
- Commit to strengthening relationships with partners, local service providers, organisation and community.

Context

The role of local government

Local government plays an important role in promoting access, equity and inclusion. As a public authority, Council must act in accordance with legislation that outlines the role of local government in creating equal and inclusive communities including:

- The *Victorian Local Government Act 2020* emphasises the role of local government in community engagement and consideration of the needs of the community in decision making. It also requires that councils provide accessible and equitable services that are responsive to the diverse needs of the community.
- The *Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020* formalises the critical role local government plays in creating more equal and inclusive communities.
- The *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* recognises the significant role of councils in improving the health and wellbeing of people in their municipality. It also requires councils to support the implementation of state priorities which include a focus on priority groups to reduce health inequalities and achieve a fair and equal society.
- The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* requires Councils to give proper consideration to human rights when delivering services, developing policies and projects, managing risks, making decisions and managing complaints. This includes the right to:
 - Respect – encouraging a culture of respect and responsibility that celebrates diversity and encourages participation
 - Equality – encouraging innovation in how we respect, promote and protect access, equity and inclusion
 - Freedom – promoting freedom of violence, harassment and bullying by ensuring human rights protections are in place
 - Dignity – our decisions will be informed by the varying needs of people within the community at different life stages and abilities.
- The *Victorian Disability Act 2006* requires local governments to develop a Disability Plan that focuses on reducing barriers to accessing facilities and employment, promoting inclusion and changing attitudes and practices towards people with a disability.
- The *Climate Change Act 2017* outlines the role of local government in supporting vulnerable communities and promoting social justice and

intergenerational equity. It also includes principles of equity and community engagement to inform decision making.

Achieving a fair and inclusive community requires more than compliance with legislation and the law. It requires a culture where shared attitudes, values and behaviours that influence the decision making, service provision, and operational practices of our organisation uphold the human rights and principles of equity and inclusion. It also relies on the use of evidence to inform decision making and collaboration from community and partners with local experience and expertise.

Community context

Resilient communities and individuals bounce back better from adversity, disaster, pressure and stress. The Nillumbik community has demonstrated its resilience and resourcefulness through experiences such as bushfire and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although everyone in the community is affected by these events, some people and groups are more vulnerable to the effects of these disasters.

The nature of disadvantage and inequality continues to evolve. In the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, many people are experiencing crisis and accessing support services for the first time. Other experiences that can lead to barriers or discrimination that will be considered when applying this policy include:

- Chronic disease or disability
- Disaster, emergency or extreme weather event
- Family violence
- Financial insecurity
- Homelessness or housing insecurity
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Mental illness
- Unemployment or under-employment.

Priority groups

For some people living in our community, there may be additional challenges in feeling included, accessing places, spaces, resources and opportunities. We recognise that some groups have been disadvantaged by inequality and discrimination, meaning that these groups may need additional assistance to reduce the barriers to access and participation. In supporting these groups, Council's focus is on achieving equality of outcomes for people by providing additional support to ensure that these groups are able to access the same opportunities as everyone else. Priority groups in Nillumbik include:

- First Nations People
- LGBTIQ+ people
- People of low socio-economic status
- Older people
- People from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People who live rurally or are geographically isolated
- People with a disability and/or chronic disease
- Refugees and people seeking asylum

- Women

Principles

The following principles represent values that will inform the application of this policy.

Leadership

Leadership is being accountable and transparent to the community. It involves modelling best practice within the community, in our decision making and our organisational culture. Demonstrating leadership means taking chances and advocating with and for the community to achieve fair and equitable outcomes.

Community

Everybody has a role in creating a more equal society. We value collective experience and knowledge of the community and will work together to ensure people can make decisions that impact them and take action on issues that are important to them. Collaboration with community will be achieved through partnerships, participation and deliberative community engagement approaches.

Equity

Equity is the commitment to apply a fair and just approach to Council practices. Equity recognises that all groups and individuals are different and some experience intersecting lifestyle, health, identity and social factors that create more barriers to positive outcomes than others.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality describes how systems and structures interact on multiple and intersecting levels to create overlapping barriers and discrimination based on characteristics. Customised responses are required in order for everyone to achieve a fair outcome appropriate with their rights and needs. Intersecting identities include characteristics such as:

- ability
- age
- faith
- gender expression
- language
- location
- mental health
- nationality
- race
- sexual orientation
- socio-economic status

Human rights and social justice

“Social justice and human rights both highlight the importance of equality, democracy, participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion. And

both place the concept of “justice” front and center in efforts to forge a more stable and equitable world.”¹

Respect for human rights and social justice is the cornerstone of strong communities in which everyone can make a contribution and be included. Progressing human rights and social justice requires strong advocacy, no tolerance for discrimination and proactive action to tackle structural and systemic discrimination, oppression, power and privilege.

Council has adopted a social justice and human rights based approach which:

- regards human rights as an opportunity to improve our decision making
- makes human rights a part of our everyday work
- treats everyone as contributing to a human rights culture
- allows us to monitor progress over time in reducing inequality and discrimination.

These strategies aim to ensure the participation of people affected by policy interventions, with a view to empowering all members of our community.

Our commitment

We will:

- Consider access, equity and inclusion in all decision making.
- Use evidence to inform deliberate and meaningful advocacy.
- Demonstrate Council’s values to protect and enhance inclusion in the community.
- Empower community to meaningfully shape decisions that impact their lives and stand up for themselves and each other.
- Celebrate the diversity of our community and actively work to reduce inequalities.
- Model inclusive and flexible workplace culture and practice.
- Invest in Councillor, employee and volunteer development to increase knowledge and practices that promote access, equity and inclusion.
- Provide accessible and adaptive information and communications that are representative of the community, regardless of physical, social and cultural barriers.
- Foster democratic representation and meaningful community engagement.
- Champion equity, participation and inclusion as we work to eliminate barriers and reduce discrimination.
- Design and deliver services that meet the diverse and future needs of our community and reduce barriers to access and inclusion.

¹ United Nations (2009) Launch of the World Day of Social Justice, February 10 Highlights from Panel Discussion. Available at:

https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/intldays/IntlJustice/launch10Feb09/highlights_panel.pdf

- Plan, design and maintain places and spaces that are welcoming, safe, accessible and inclusive of the needs of all community members.
- Celebrate, embrace and be informed by our unique identity and acknowledge our changing community.

Application

This policy applies to the delivery of Council services, programs and activities as well as the design, provision and management of facilities, infrastructure and open spaces.

All Councillors, employees, volunteers and contractors carrying out work on behalf of Council are required to comply with this policy.

Implementation and review

This policy is supported by strategies, plans and programs across Council to ensure that Council's commitments are implemented and maintained. Progress will be monitored and outcomes will be reported regularly to the community through Council's annual report.

This policy will be reviewed every four years following the adoption of the four-year Nillumbik Health and Wellbeing Plan. A review will consider how effectively principles and policy commitments have been embedded across the organisation, strength of partnerships and community impact.

Opportunities to improve access, equity and inclusion are also identified and monitored through Gender Impact Assessments which are undertaken when developing new policies, programs and service reviews.

Complaints

We are committed to enabling members of our community to raise their concerns about Council with ease and confidence and managing these complaints fairly, objectively and in a timely manner.

A complaint is a way for members of our community to let Council know that they are dissatisfied with:

- the quality of an action, decision made, facility or service provided by a Council or a contractor engaged by Council
- the delay by Council or contractor engaged by Council in taking action, making a decision or providing a service
- policy decision made by Council or contractor engaged by Council.

Complaints provide Council with important information about its services, our customers' experiences, and can create an opportunity to address customer concerns, build greater community advocacy for Council and its services, as well as identify areas of service that need improvement.

Complaints can be made in accordance with Nillumbik Shire Council's Complaints Handling Policy. For additional information or including our Complaints Handling Policy, please visit [Making a complaint - Nillumbik Shire Council](#)

Supporting Council policies, strategies and plans

- Arts and Culture Strategy (under development)
- Ageing Well in Nillumbik Action Plan 2019 – 2022
- Climate Action Plan (under development)
- Community Engagement Policy
- Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040
- Complaints Handling Policy
- Council Plan 2022 – 2025
- Customer First Strategy
- Disability Action Plan 2020 – 2024
- Gender Equality Action Plan 2021 – 2025
- Housing Strategy (to be developed)
- Municipal Emergency Management Plan
- Municipal Planning Strategy
- Nillumbik Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021 – 2025
- Nillumbik Placemaking Framework
- Open Space Strategy (to be developed)
- Reconciliation Action Plan (to be developed)
- Reconciliation Charter
- Recreation and Leisure Strategy (under development)
- Youth Strategy 2022 – 2026

Supporting legislation

Commonwealth

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*

State

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*
- *Climate Change Act 2017*
- *Crimes Act 2005*
- *Disability Act 2006*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Mental Health Act 1986*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985*

- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*

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Glossary

Class is a system of structured inequality based on unequal distributions of power, education, wealth and income that determine social position and status.

Diversity is what makes each of us unique and includes our backgrounds, personality, life experiences and beliefs. It is a combination of our differences that shape our view of the world, our perspective and our approach. Diversity is also about recognising, respecting and valuing differences.

Disadvantage is a term that is often used to describe inequity faced by people of lower social position. It is socially constructed, imposed on people and limits their opportunities in life or health.

Equality is the state of affairs that prevails when all individuals and/or groups of people are given equal treatment, regardless of need or outcome.

Equity is the state of affairs that prevails when support or resources are distributed according to need, the purpose being to ensure more equal outcomes for all.

Family violence is a broader term than domestic violence, as it refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members.

Gender is the socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women; gender defines masculinity and femininity. Gender expectations vary between cultures and can change over time.

Human rights are basic entitlements that belong to every one of us, regardless of our background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe.

Inclusion occurs when people feel, and are, valued and respected. Regardless of their personal characteristic or circumstance.

Intersectionality describes how systems and structures interact on multiple and intersecting levels to create overlapping barriers and discrimination based on characteristics.

Sex is the biological and physical characteristics used to define humans as male or female.

Social inclusion is about people being able to participate in society and creating conditions for equal opportunities for all. Social inclusion requires that all individuals be able to 'secure a job; access services; connect with family, friends, work, personal interests and local community; deal with personal crisis; and have their voices heard.

Social justice seeks to create equal political, economic, and social rights for all people.

Vulnerability refers to the inability of people, organisations, and societies to withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed.

